

## **mama said to smile while I still have teeth by nervoussis**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Billy Hargrove Has a Crush on Steve Harrington, Dentists, Fluff and Humor, Light Angst, M/M, Post-Season/Series 03, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Pre-Relationship, Protective Steve Harrington, Wisdom Teeth

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2021-06-19

**Updated:** 2021-06-19

**Packaged:** 2022-03-31 13:53:41

**Rating:** Mature

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 2

**Words:** 4,474

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

“It’s not so bad.” Steve’s heart gives a painful, gripping thud. “You get a free ice pack out of the deal and decent high from the silly gas, if you’re lucky.”

Billy nods. “We’re gonna be late.”

Which. “Yeah, sorry.”

“It’s alright.”

“We’ll get you there lickety-split.” Steve pulls out of the driveway, fingers gripping the wheel when Billy places the still-warm muffin in his lap.

(or) a very different post-starcourt Billy gets his wisdom teeth removed.

## 1. Part One

In a moment of weakness and textbook junior year assholery, Steve gets his stomach ripped out and fed to him for suggesting that Billy could take the bus.

And it's not without reason.

Hopper and Joyce have work. And Robin would ask too many questions--*why the shaved head, why the ratty black hoodie and sweatpants, why the perpetual vow of silence*--and the only one of the kids that have their permit is Dustin.

But Max behaves as if none of that matters. Looks at Steve as if he set the house on fire himself.

"Or you could take him." She sneers. Like that's somehow a good idea. "You have a car."

"Billy wouldn't get in a car with me even if you paid him."

Steve doesn't say he'd rather face a barrel of Demodogs one-handed than be left alone with Billy. Would rather lick black slime off his own dick than feel those silent, cool blue eyes pouring like ice water down the ridges of his skin.

Steve wants to say it. Doesn't. When Max starts crying. "His legs don't work as good anymore."

"Billy gave me a concussion."

"He's got gas money." She says, voice winding tight with desperation.

And Steve despises the painful, weeping grip of her fingers when they close around his forearm. Hates that she cares so much for someone who could never care for her.

"I know it's not much." Max swallows thickly. "I know he used to be a piece of shit, but he's--"

"Different," Steve says heavily, scrubbing at his forehead. "I know."

--

Billy slides into the passenger seat with a thermos in one hand and a cranberry muffin in the other and Steve isn't used to it, the way his body seems to have deflated. Limbs cut from marionette strings, hanging limp as if gravity hasn't quite learned what to do with them.

Billy places the muffin and the thermos on the dashboard between them, and.

Steve expects something.

A thank you, which could come later. A hello, which should come now.

Billy nods at the dashboard.

Steve jots into action. "Oh. These aren't for you?"

Billy grunts, reaching to pass the goodies over as if Steve were incapable of doing it himself. The thermos is warm in Steve's hand. Sturdy.

"Coffee?" He asks, jerking with surprise when Billy mutters; "Hazelnut." In a voice as soft as feather down.

Steve waits for Billy to say something else.

Billy doesn't. He just turns and peers out the passenger side window, into the gentle swell of rain that's started to fall.

"Thanks. Thank you." Steve says. He starts the car. Let's it warm. Tries not to feel like this is the first time their bodies have had to reacquaint themselves with one another.

Tries not to marvel at how beautiful silvery thin lines can be. Running from the shell of an ear and disappearing, quick, into the hood nestled around broad shoulders.

Steve rubs his hands together, tearing his eyes away. "First time at

the dentist?”

And Billy doesn't say anything.

Never says anything, anymore, but. That doesn't stop the conversation from feeling communal. Shared.

“I got my wisdom teeth out when I was fourteen.” Steve peers through the windshield. It's raining harder now. “Don't remember much about the whole thing. Mom says I tried to stop the aquarium fish from drowning. And that I had to be double belted on the way home--”

“Will it hurt?” Billy turns to look at him, and. His eyes are welling up. Cheeks and nose red, as if stung by October winds.

Billy whispers, “I wanted Max to come but she had school.”

His hand is covered by the sleeve of his hoodie, fabric scrubbing rough at the stubble along his jaw. “Did they hurt you?”

Steve doesn't like the way he says it.

Like there really is something to be afraid of, at the core of it all. Like no one has ever considered the possibility.

“It's not so bad.” Steve's heart gives a painful, gripping thud. “You get a free ice pack out of the deal and decent high from the silly gas, if you're lucky.”

Billy nods. “We're gonna be late.”

Which. “Yeah, sorry.”

“It's alright.”

“We'll get you there lickety-split.” Steve pulls out of the driveway, fingers gripping the wheel when Billy places the still-warm muffin in his lap.

--

He sticks around for the procedure just to stop Billy from looking like he's being dropped on his first day of kindergarten. The waiting room is bright. Warm and colorful, plush couches stocked full of overstuffed pillows. All within throwing distance of machine labeled *free coffee* :)

Not a bad dig, all things considered, but.

Billy says Steve doesn't have to wait around. Doesn't even have to come back at all. The nurse calls his name and Billy stands, shoulders lined with tension, before turning to whisper, "I'll take the bus back to Neil's."

And Steve knows. Gets it.

The universe running a test. An experiment that will prove whether Steve's really got a heart under all that chest hair.

Steve lifts his *Highlights* magazine. "I'm good."

"Really?"

"Dude, It's pouring outside," Steve says, shaking his hair out for good measure. "I'll just wait. In case you're too high to function."

Billy looks like he wants to say something else, so. Steve gives his full attention. Plans on the preverbal *thank you* that'll probably never come, but. The nurse calls that name again.

Billy Hargrove.

And Billy turns to go, hands tangled in the sleeves of his hoodie.

--

His cheeks are swollen, like.

A chipmunk.

Stuffed full of little cotton pads that could be acorns. They *are* acorns, Billy insists when the nurse brings Steve back to the operation room. He's parked on the dentist's bench. Curled into a ball with a thumb in

his mouth when Steve rounds the corner.

“Steve,” Billy says thickly. “They took my teeth out but I have acorns.” He reaches across the space between them, fingers grasping Steve’s wrist tightly.

Too tight, but.

Steve can’t bring himself to care when the nurse says, “Billy, take your thumb out of your mouth.”

And Billy says. “I need to suck on something cold.” He pulls Steve right up to the edge of the bench, sitting with a serious glint in his eye. “Our acorns will be good for winter, right?”

He sways, nearly falling off the leather table, so.

Steve grasps his shoulder. Puts him back in place. “Probably? I don’t think acorns go bad.”

“We gotta make sure, ‘cause I don’t want you to starve.” Billy slurs, dropping to dead weight when the nurse gets an arm underneath him and asks Steve to get the kid on his feet.

Billy lands somewhere against Steve’s ribs, swaying dramatically as bright red drool slides over his chin.

The nurse swears under her breath, going at it with a towel.

Billy swats her hand away. He staggers as Steve thanks the nurse and leads them into the waiting room.

“You’re so pretty, Stever.” Billy reaches out again, fingertips poking Steve’s eyelid. “Can’t starve for the winter. Gotta get pretty boys their acorns--”

“Stop poking me--”

“Acorn soup.” Billy sings. “Acorn pie and casserole and lollipops covered in sugar.”

Steve manages to get the doors open with zero help from Billy,

chuckling as warm, soft palms circle around his shoulder blades.

They're hugging.

In the rain.

At the dentist's office.

Steve hugs back, squawking when Billy's nose brushes against his heartbeat. "C'mon, dude, we gotta--"

"Will you carry me, Stever?"

"No," Steve says, manhandling Billy from his chest to his ribcage, determined to make it across the lot in one piece. "You're solid muscle, there's no way I could carry you."

Billy makes a noise, pretty pink lips forming a pout when Steve looks over at him.

"I got all the acorns ready for winter and you can't carry me to the car?" Billy grumbles, leaning against the side of the Beamer while Steve gets his key into the lock.

Steve untangles himself from the arms that fold around his waist. "Billy--"

"You smell like grass."

"Gee, thanks."

"No, like sweet grass." Billy cackles, doubling over at his own joke, and. Pulling Steve down with him. "Sweet ass, right?"

"You're insane," Steve whispers, somehow out of breath from. The hands on his neck. He lets Billy pet through his hair and then Steve yanks on the door handle, opening it, like, "Alright. Get in."

Billy has more blood on his face. "Wanna sit with you."

"We will."

"Can I lay on your chest?"

Steve's face hurts from smiling. "You won't fit."

"I could!" Billy whimpers, jerking away from Steve as he tries to get the blood off his chin. "I could be like a kitty cat--"

"Would you just--" Steve gets his hands on him, wiping at Billy's mouth with his thumb. "Hold still, alright?"

"Alright." Billy kisses Steve's finger. Chaste and quick, gone before either really know what's happening. Those blue eyes pull Steve in, drink him down. "How come you're so pretty?" Billy asks.

And. "Dunno," Steve says, sounding just as out of breath as he feels. Like they've been running laps, and.

Steve thinks maybe they have.

All around Hawkins. Through the years. Past each other.

Billy holds still under the weight of ten fingers before frowning. Sticking his little swollen lip out. "Can we go home now?"

Steve backs away, gripping the edge of the door. "Sure."

"Not to Neil's," Billy mutters to himself, leaning into the leather seat when Steve gets his limbs folded into the car. He cranes his head, eyes huge and watery. "Can I hang out with you?"

Steve moves to close the door. "Sure."

Billy stops him. "Are you mad at me?"

"No, Billy."

"Then why are you trying to close the door?" Billy demands, peering through narrowed eyes.

Steve chuckles at that, squeezing the fingers that curl into the palm of his hand. "We gotta close the door so we can drive the car back to my house."

Billy yanks his hand away. "Your house." He says as if tasting the



words on his tongue.

Steve nods. "Do you want to go to my house?"

"Do you have macaroni and cheese?"

"Yeah, I can." Steve wills himself to stop smiling. "I can make some after you take a nap."

Billy stops the door from closing again. "I'll be cold if I try to sleep."

And he says it like.

No one's ever believed him. Billy speaks with an anchor in his voice, the weight of it pulling Steve in. Forward, until he understands.

Steve grips the edge of the door.

Nods. Lets Billy know that there are ways around it.

Billy's crying, and. Steve doesn't want to see him cry anymore. Ever again. They've been through too much. He takes Billy's hand and squeezes tight, smiling softly when cool blue eyes peer up at him.

"Then we can eat macaroni and watch T.V.--"

"We can?"

"Yeah," Steve says softly. "And when you're ready to go home I'll take you. Keep you safe."

He moves to close the door, chuckling when a firm, sure hand holds it in place.

Billy stares at him. "What if I never wanna go home again?"

Steve thinks about it, tapping his knuckles on the hood of the car. He shrugs. "Guess we'll cross that bridge when we get there, yeah?"

"Yeah," Billy says.

This time, when the door is closed, Steve runs to the other side. Not wanting to miss a single moment.

## 2. Part Two

Billy hops down from the passenger side like it's written in a script or something. Part B of his master plan, logical in the journey of what happens next.

He swings the car door open and charges through wet grass. Neon green blades stick to the heel of his boot, lopsided smile drawn forward to inspect the ferns nestled on either side of a welcome mat that says *Bless this Mess*.

It's as if he's been here before.

As if he belongs.

Steve watches Billy collapse on the porch swing, arms, and legs folded under him like a house of cards toppled over in the wind. He must not realize that it's functional, or something, because Billy sits bolt upright and uses the toe of his boot to get the swing moving, once he does.

Really moving, like. Banging against the bay window his mother leaves clear for her azaleas, *moving*.

Billy hollers. Makes grabby hands, like, "Push me!"

"You're gonna get seasick." Steve chuckles, watching Billy shrug and take it for a ride.

Billy brings the swing to a sudden halt, when. "How come you're all the way down there?" he asks.

Catching on.

Steve watches him struggle to get his feet up on the swing. Feels his heart shudder in fondness when Billy grins up at him triumphantly.

"Didn't know there were other options," Steve says.

"There aren't. Come here." Billy gestures to the porch when Steve's legs decide to fizzle out. "It's a carnival ride. You got one on your

porch, at your house, and--”

Steve claims the second cushion when Billy removes the thumb from his mouth long enough to spell it out for him. “Cuddles.” He says.

Simple.

And his eyes are so blue. Bright. Steve doesn’t have a choice because, really, they’ve swapped sides with the rope.

Up and left this dimension altogether when the flea got squashed by the acrobat deciding that they could skip the apologies and get to the good part.

Steve realizes that he wants this.

Billy. Scooting impossibly closer and humming the bridge to *Mama Mia*. “You smell good, Stever,” Billy says around the pad of his thumb. Dripping more blood down the front of his hoodie, and. Trying to get his face in Steve’s neck.

Which should be gross, but.

Steve just clears a path. Makes room for the warm nose that sniffs a trail up and around one ear. “You said I smelled like ass,” He accuses, sounding shaky. Starstruck.

Billy’s breath feels like fairy wings. “Wrong. I said you smell like sweet grass and *have* a sweet ass, didn’t you pay attention to my context clues?”

“Um.” There’s something warm on Steve’s throat. Going wet in the middle, parting and sucking and--

He pulls away.

Billy smiles at him. tries to get in Steve’s lap but the bench moves with him and when the bench moves with him, Steve’s got a brick wall glued to his side.

Shivering. Cold, or afraid. Nervous.

“You tired?”

Billy shakes his head. With his whole body. “Wanna hang out.”

“You can sleep for a little bit. I’ll still be there when you--”

Billy grunts. Refuses, so. Steve rubs the side of Billy’s shoulder, instead. Fabric and muscle and heat living somewhere beneath his fingertips. “You don’t wanna go in?”

“Nope.” Billy somehow works his way under Steve’s arm.

Feels right, striking oil in the heartland.

--

It starts raining again. Somewhere along the way, it starts getting cold and Billy shivers, peering up at Steve like he made it happen.

Like the heavens split open and bleeding at his command.

Steve chuckles, pushing off the swing and laughing harder when Billy squawks like an angry rooster.

“Where are we going?” He demands.

“Inside.”

Billy seems to hate that, like. *Instantly*.

“Don’t make me carry you, Hargrove.”

“Oh, look who’s got Popeye arms all of a sudden.” Billy leans back on the porch swing, thighs spread like. He has no idea how *fucking--*

It doesn’t matter.

“You need to eat.”

“My stitches haven’t fallen out.”

“Yeah, and they won’t. Not for days.” Steve leans against one of the porch posts, trying not to crack a smile when Billy’s thumb finds his

mouth again. "Unless you're planning to eat your hand, we gotta get some mac and cheese--"

Billy's off the swing before Steve realizes what's happened. He wanders in between the ferns in their bright orange pots. Jamming a thumb at the number above the doorbell, like, "This door?"

And. "Yeah?"

"This is the one with the cheese?"

"And the mac too." Steve winks at him, watching a warm blush spread across a sea of freckles. He cocks his head, like, "What's up?"

"Maybe we can go inside," Billy says harshly. "For a minute. To kiss the noodles or something--"

"Kiss the?"

"Open the door," Billy suggests. "Now."

So Steve does, biting down on a smile when Billy clomps through the foyer, tracking dirt and grass and pieces of Steve's heart across imported marble.

"This is so huge," Billy says softly. His eyes go bright all of a sudden and he's right in Steve's face. "You probably have so many pillows here. And chairs. And blankets, too, like. The big ones--"

"Yeah?"

"Let's build a fort, Stever," Billy says desperately. He bounces a little, managing to knock more mud onto the floor beneath him. "Let's build a house. For me and you, and the noodles if they wanna stay the night."

Steve grins, untangling Billy's fingers from his hair. "Yeah, I guess we could do that."

"Really?"

"Sure." Steve points to the ground. "Boots off first, though."

Billy jerks away. “No.”

“Stop being a little shit for like, three seconds--”

“Stop being a party pooper. For like. *Your entire adulthood.*” Billy shoots back, collapsing onto the staircase and holding his foot in one hand anyway.

Steve holds his breath.

Billy stares at the boot, and his foot *inside* the boot, like maybe the connection between them is lost.

Steve feels like an asshole for finding it adorable, but. Billy looks up at him through his eyelashes.

“I think I’m still high.” He theorizes.

“Yup.” Steve tugs his own shoes off, placing them on the rack by the door.

“I don’t think I can untangle the knots,” Billy says miserably. He tries, though, scowling like the laces have done it on purpose.

Steve watches him struggle, and laughs at the struggle, before holding out his hands. “Give me your foot.”

Billy stares at him. “Really?”

“Our only other option is to wait around until you figure it out, and who knows how long that’ll take,” Steve says, waiting for Billy to shoot back with something venomous.

He doesn’t.

He coos, instead. Like a baby bird, pointing his toes in the air with a giggle. “I’m Cinderella and you’re the prince,” Billy declares, laughing harder when Steve drops to his knees and gets the boot off in one go. “Prince Charming, Prince--”

“You’re just saying that because I have amazing hair and you have little blonde princess curls.”

“Hey.” Billy deadpans, holding out his second foot. “It grows out of my hair like that.”

“Head.” Steve chuckles.

Billy’s mouth falls open in a silent O, brows drawn in confusion.

Steve puts both muddy boots on the rack next to his own, smiling down at Billy’s puzzled face. “Your hair grows out of your *head* like that.”

“It does?” Billy asks in wonder. “I like it. Do you like it?”

And. “Yeah. It’s cute.” Steve says, holding out his hand. “Come on. Lunchtime.”

Billy lets Steve pull him up, swaying a little bit at their proximity.

He doesn’t pull away, and.

This close his eyes aren’t just blue, they’re green. And yellow. And brown, like a kaleidoscope.

“Am I a cute person, Stever?” Billy asks softly.

“The cutest,” Steve says. Without thinking, but.

It doesn’t seem to matter. Because Billy’s high as a fucking kite, wiggling his hips and saying, “I think you’re cuter than me. Softer. Like an oil painting, or maybe a box of raspberry macaroons.”

Steve chuckles, not even trying to pull away when Billy’s fingers try to force their way into his mouth. “When have you had macaroons?”

“I haven’t,” Billy admits easily. “But I always thought that maybe you tasted like one.”

Steve opens his mouth to say something, but. Billy’s gone after that. Running his fingers along the wall and disappearing around the corner.

“C’mon, Stever! I want cheese-flavored kisses.”

And Steve.

Doesn't think Billy will remember this.

--

They order pizza instead. Steve knows that Billy's gotta be careful with his incision marks. Not go too heavy on the fat and grease, less than three hours after his surgery, but.

Steve tries to hold blue eyes even as they slip through his fingers. Pools and rivers disappear beneath the Earth.

He's starting to think that maybe.

All it would take is a bat of those stupid eyelashes and Steve would throw every responsible thought out the window.

Billy says, "You got a laundry machine?" After the pizza performs its vanishing act.

And Steve says, "Yeah, why?"

Two seconds before Billy is stripping down naked.

"Woah, Woah, *hey--*"

"There's Kool-Aid on my hoodie," Billy says from behind a wall of fabric. "I can't walk around with red juice on my clothes, people will know I'm a vampire then."

"You're a vampire?" Steve tries to look away from Billy's stomach.

The smooth planes of skin, soft just above a layer of muscle. He puts a hand over his eyes for good measure. Safekeeping when Billy gets the hoodie off in one go and he's standing there.

Shirtless.

In the middle of the room like some kind of wet dream Steve never even realized he had.

Billy grins, curls sticking out in every direction. "They'd think it."



And Steve's brain is, fucking.

Offline. Distracted. He blinks, tearing his eyes away from Billy's chest long enough to go, "Think what?"

"That I'm a vampire."

And Steve thinks he couldn't be. Too tan. Too--

Alive. Steve shrugs. "I don't think it."

"That's because you don't think." Billy tosses the hoodie onto the floor. He points at Steve, like, "Can I wear your sweater?"

And Steve looks down at himself. "This one?"

"Yeah," Billy says. "Smells like you."

And Steve doesn't even have to think about it. Doesn't even consider what it might mean, pulling the fabric over his head and handing it to an asshole who examines his *Kate Bush* tee shirt and says, "That one too."

Like he's *trying* to make Steve catch on fire.

Steve shakes his head. "What will I wear if you take all my clothes?"

Billy shrugs, like, "Not my problem."

And he's uncovering truths with those eyes. Getting a little too close to the root of it, the revelation, so.

Steve gives Billy the shirt too.

And tries not to think about the four seconds that they're both shirtless. Standing in a room together, just. looking. Charting unmarked skin, eyes glazing silver springs on bronze soil.

Billy puts the tee-shirt on, and the sweater over the top of that, until It's just Steve.

Half naked in the living room.

"I'll go grab another shirt, and then, um." It feels like the walls are burning down. Steve's thoughts fall like bullet points. "We should go outside," He says. "Wanna go sit on the swing?"

Billy frowns. "'S cold outside."

"Yeah, but." Steve picks the hoodie off the ground. "I'll keep you warm."

--

Billy's fingers don't leave his skin. Don't soothe, when they light trails of smoke over his collarbone.

Steve leans in to the touch anyway.

Gives in to the pull, anyway, when Billy grabs his cheek and brings their eyes together, looking every bit like he's got something to say.

Something important.

"What?" Steve asks. Wanting to touch. Wanting to--

"You know my mom threw a plate at my old man," Billy says, eyes resting on a scar they both know is there. Hidden, like gold beneath caverns of rock. "The day she left, she. Threw my Mickie Mouse at him."

"Your plate?"

"It was a bowl."

"I'm sure he deserved it," Steve says easily. "I'm sure it was the only way to win."

"There aren't any winners with stuff like that," Billy says gently. His eyes are watery again. Steve's getting suspicious of it like maybe that's just how the world comes together for Billy. With water and spheres of blue.

God hovering over the surface of the deep.

Billy sighs, thumb twitching against his leg. "Neil would've killed her."

And Steve hates Neil.

Knows more than he probably should. Pays attention, takes notes.

"That just means she's resourceful, right?" Steve whispers. "Using the stuff around her to fight fair."

"Wasn't fair," Billy whispers, finally looking away. Blue eyes study the rain as it drips from the trees above.

"Clean, then." Steve shifts, rocking the porch swing as he sits criss-cross with his knees pressed against Billy's thigh. "Even fight. Clean break."

He wonders how he can get those eyes on him again.

How he can be taken apart.

"No such thing."

Steve doesn't get it. "What do you mean?"

"All breaks sever the bone."

And Steve thinks. Maybe. "Are you high?" He squints at Billy's face, trying to see if it's written on his forehead.

Billy smirks. "I think so."

"Still high," Steve says, wanting to lift his fingers. Prod at swollen cheeks. He doesn't when Billy's eyes start welling up again. "Don't cry," Steve suggests, sliding closer. "Don't cry, Billy--"

"I'm sorry about--"

"I know."

"That night. It was. I never should've--"

"She's your sister," Steve says fiercely. Because. "We were trying to

protect you.” And he was. At the root of it all, deep in the center of himself. Steve turns outward again, feet planted on the ground. “We didn’t want you to get roped into our shit. With the monsters, you were.”

Billy’s staring at him.

Watching. Steve can feel it, so. He closes his own eyes, just to even the score. To make it easier when his lips say, “You’re too beautiful to have your life cracked open like that.”

Billy doesn’t speak until he does, voice flickering like candlelight behind a window covered in frost. “Life was already laying in pieces on the rug.”

And there are fingers in Steve’s hair. Brushing tears from his cheeks. Billy grabs him by the throat with more care, more.

Love.

Than Steve ever thought he would get in this life. Billy moves him until they’re right in each other’s space. Breathing the same air, no longer running races to escape one another.

It feels right.

Billy smiles at him. “Thank you.”

And Steve doesn’t know what for. Doesn’t care what for, but there’s a finger on his mouth, parting his lips. Billy’s eyes burn a hole in his tongue. Clear a path through muscle and bone, until Steve is pulled forward.

Into an embrace.

Into a trilogy of kisses; on the corner of his eye. On the bridge of his nose. On the bow of his lip that turns biting. And bruising.

Billy asks if he can lay on Steve’s chest, because.

“I’ve always wanted to do that.” He says shyly. Billy kisses him once more and Steve.

Goes down easy.

**Author's Note:**

If you like what you see and wanna know how insane I am, follow me on social media:

Twitter: @nervoussis

Tumblr: @passivenovember